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ABSTRACT

The experience of an elementary school implementing the Touchstones Program--an approach to assessment within the proposed National Curriculum (NC) in England--is described, after which teacher reaction to the NC and fundamental beliefs about the nature of education are considered. The Touchstones assessment consist of 10 cross-curricular group assessments for children aged 6 to 8 years. These assessments are intended to provide qualitative information on performance in English, science, and design and technology for students in the changed environment created by the NC. These assessments incorporate attainment targets identified by NC working groups and are considered one of a range of approaches to assessment under the NC. The Touchstones Program uses three different assessments: those made by the teacher directly from observation; those devised from student-kept records; and those observations that are not recorded until all the activities have been completed. The approach was tested with 2 groups comprised of 6 children between 6 and 8 years of age who explored the strengths of paper, plastic, and tin-foil under wet and dry conditions. The assessment provided teachers and administrators with an understanding of what will be involved when NC procedures are implemented, and it raised questions about the influences that the NC will have on education, particularly assessment-driven education. Teachers in the trial interpreted the criteria for reaching levels within the attainment targets as implying changes in their teaching practice, suggesting that teaching to the targets is one probable result of the NC. A number of other concerns are discussed, including the concern being felt at the higher levels by tutors and students like that "training to become a teacher" has been replaced by "learning about the National Curriculum, Assessment, and Records of Achievement." (SLD)

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OUT OF THE ARMCHAIR AND OVER THE PARAPET; DILEMMAS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR -RUBBISHING OR REINFORCING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM?

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OUT OF THE ARMCHAIR AND OVER THE PARAPET:DILEMMAS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR - RUBBISHING OR REINFORCING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM ?

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Introduction

This paper started out as a straight-forward account of an 'in-service' activity designed to provide one school, and me, with some -as near as one could get- experience of the conduct of assessment in a primary schol as it might be at Key Stage 1.

The first part consists of that account. The second part considers the position of the professional educator relating to the National Curriculum, to teachers in their current circumstances and to fundamental beliefs about the nature of education

Part 1

The front line of the National Curriculum moves closer and closer. At one time, and not so long ago, it was remote in time and space. It was something that was happening down in London or York and it would be a long time a-coming only. Now it's here. For me the front line is now St.Matthew's Primary School in Liverpool. The school, on the edge of one of the city's arterial road, with its satellite church, (or is it the other way around) is bursting with lively, busy, well-dressed, well-cared for children and where the girls in the playground display the most amazing soccer skills.(Is that a sexist comment? Probably.)

The Headteacher and a class teacher agreed to take part in a trial of part of the NFER Touchstones[1], which is an approach to assessment within the National Curriculum. For those not familiar with Touchstones there will now follow a brief outline of this approach: those familiar with it can skip to the next section.

Touchstones: philosophy and approach

> **'Touchstones has been designed to meet the needs of teachers in assessing and recording the progress and attainments of their pupils in the changed environment created by the National Curriculum'** [p10].

It consists of ten cross-curricular group assessments for 6-8 year olds. The assessments are said to provide qualitative information on performance in the subjects of English, Science and Design and Technology. The Touchstones assessments incorporate Attainment Targets identified by NC subject working groups and as amended by Orders.

Each Touchstone Activity Booklet [with titles such as,'The Day Out, Feathers, The Picnic, Skittles, The Barge, Crates and Materials'] has has five or more tasks / activities which can be undertaken at various times with groups of up to six pupils working individually and co-operatively.

As now recommended in NCC 2 [1989][2] Touchstones provides a variety presentational modes, operational modes and responses modes to

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[1] Gillian Jones, Vivienne Cato, Mary Hargreaves and Chris Whetton.[1989] Touchstones; Cross-Curriculuar Group Assessments,Teacher's Guide. NFER-Nelson.

[2] National Curriculum Council [1989] Curriculum Guidance Two. A Curriculum for All; Special Educational needs in the National Curriculum. National Curriculum Council, York.

cater for a wide range of abilities. Each topic allows assessment over Levels 1 to 4 at Key Stage 1 though three workbooks are needed to cover an large proportion of the Attainment Targets. Each Activity Booklet indicates the resources which are needed and these are 'normally available' in the Primary School.

Each pupil in the group is given an individual Activity Booklet on which they enter their responses by writing or drawing and this record can be examined afterwards by the teacher to come to a view about the child's performance. On-going observation by the teacher supplements the recorded evidence and both observed and written 'evidence' is entered into a Group Assessment Booklet. This provides a record of how the pupil performs in relation to specific Attainment Targets within Levels 1-4.

Touchstones presents itself as one of a range of possible approaches to assessment under the NC. Its two main purposes are

1] the assessment of pupils over a broad range of Attainment Targets from the four subject areas [E,M, Sc and D&T] and to provide information which will assist teachers in their future planning:

2] to help with 'teacher professional development' which will be assisted through teachers becoming secure about their ability to assess children and in doing so to become more confident about developing their own assessment practices.

Fig 1. Group Assessment Booklet

Assessment Checklist

Attainment Targets (ATs)	Level	Performance	Pupils' names/initials					
English AT 1 Speaking and listening	1	Makes little oral contribution but listens to others and responds.						✓
	2	Talks and listens well in group.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	3	Makes strong contributions to group work, listens attentively and speaks responsively.	✓	✓	→	✓	→	X

During the completion of the Activity Booklets the outcomes of the assessment of Attainment Targets are entered into a Group Assessment Booklet.[Fig 1.] This data together with the informal teacher comments are transferred to an Individual Pupil Profile [Fig 2.] which summarises the pupil's attainments with respect to specific Attainment Targets and these are 'translated' into summarised statements about the attainments of the child, together with diagnostic in-sights and suggestions for follow-up work.[Fig 3

Fig 2. **Individual Pupil Profile [a] Attainment Targets**

Materials Denise

ENGLISH Attainment Targets (ATs)	Level 1	2	3	4	Overall level	Comments
AT 1	✓					
AT 2			✓			
AT 3	✓					
AT 4		✓				
AT 5		✓				

Fig 3. **Individual Pupil Profile [b] Summary and Follow-up**

ANDREW

ENGLISH

A good reader, but needs to try to put more expression into voice when reading aloud. Handwriting neat

MATHEMATICS

Copes well with new topics but does require re-assurance

SCIENCE

Enjoys doing experiments and carries them out

In summary, The Touchstones approach uses a cross-curricular topic deployed within a group situation with tasks directly related to Attainment Targets linked to core and foundation subjects which produces a statement of achievement at Key Stage 1.

The practical test

Aims

The aims of the trial were to gain experience in using Touchstones to see how its philosophy and approach stood up to the rough and tumble of classroom practice, to examine and reflect upon the workbooks in the scheme [content, motivation etc], the assessment of pupils' achievements under National Curriculum assessment protocols [Subjects, Profiles and Attainment Targets], to listen to pupils reactions and responses and possibly the most important aspect, to hear the views of the teachers.

There was the additional component that such trial would provide an opportunity to 'experience' what it might be like to deliver part of the assessment which the National Curriculum will require. It was seen by us as a practical first step, attempting to move beyond some of the rather sterile INSET programmes in which the general concepts of TGAT approach to assessment had been the staple diet. This was seen as a small move in the direction of reality. This was not to say that we thought that assessment under the National Curriculum would necessarily be identical with the Touchstones model as we were aware that the Consortia developing Standard Assessment Tasks had very different philosophies. [Differentiation by task or by outcome] Our approach was experiential, and cautious and exploratory with regard to Touchstones' two main purposes: assessment and professional development.

Preparation

The trial was prefaced by an intensive 'in-service' session with the Headteacher for whom Touchstones was a novel approach and a considerable time was spent pouring over the Handbook, finding out how the Workbooks were to be used, how the Group Assessment Booklet was to be completed with respect to Attainment Targets, Levels and teacher informal comments and most importantly, the selection of the pupil groups. We then explored how the evidence contained in Group Booklets was to be transferred to the Individual Record Sheet and how the rather formal language of 'English, [Speaking and Listening] AT1, Level 2' was to changed on the Pupil Profile into the kind of language which made normal communication possible. [For example, talking with parents who might not be familiar with the assessment idiolect of the National Curriculum] At the end of this period it was agreed to try one Activity Book with two groups of seven year olds.

The Activity Book chosen was 'Materials'. This has six sub-'Activities'.[A-F]. Each child had a workbook and they needed the following materials - paper, tin foil, plastic and to investigate the materials they needed sandpaper, scissors, block of wood, ruler and a bowl of water. The assessments based upon the children's exploration of the strengths of three common materials [paper, plastic and tin-foil] under wet and dry conditions. Each child was supplied with sufficient material to cut out their own samples. Activities are explored within the group although each child conducts his or her own experiment and records the results individually. The pupils, as recommended, worked in a small group with a maximum of six pupils per group. The pupils selected for this work were chosen to represent the wide ability range within the school and also that they were the right age [between 6 and 8 years of age], that is, were at or near Key Stage 1.

After assembling the materials the teacher introduced the first session.

'Today we going to work with these special booklets. We will work together in a group. but I want you to do your best on your own and not to copy. If you make a mistake, cross it out neatly with one line - don't rub it out - and write your new answer beside it. First of all, write your name on the front.'

The various materials were named and a discussion of the material took place before getting down to the first activity. During the Activities the teacher observed her pupils and noted their achievements in the Group Assessment Booklet.

For example, in Activity A, the pupils cut out a piece of paper 10x8cms and use that piece as a template to cut others of a similar size from the plastic and the tin foil. Touchstones connects this task with particular Attainment targets. Observing the children at work the teacher completes one of the squares in the Assessment Check List for each child against Mathematics AT 8 ['measures'] and records, for example, that Laura was working at Level 3 in this AT ['uses ruler independently to measure out a rectangle']

Touchstones uses three different kinds of assessment. They are

a] those made by the teacher directly from observation
b] those which are made from the evidence or records which the children place in their Booklets and
c] those observations which while taking place throughout all the Activities are not recorded until all the Activities have been completed.

[For example, English AT1, 'speaking and listening'; here judgement about the Level reached is deferred until all the Activities have been completed.]

These different ways of recording achievement had to be understood as well as the distinctive marking system employed by Touchstones. This enables the teacher to note whether the Level has been attained [tick], ia almost attained [arrow], not attained [cross] or whether the Level was not assessable [zero]

Getting going

Because of certain organisational factors within the school it was decided to have one group of six taught out of their normal classroom with the other group to be taught within their regular classroom.

The members of the groups were selected as noted earlier, so as to provide a mixed ability group. The material for 'Materials' were collected and the first of the practical problems arose. 'Materials' requires the children to have a bowl of water to use in their testing of the material. In this old 'two-decker school' there was no water on the first floor and it had to be carried up and equally important, it had to be taken down, immediately afterwards, to avoid the possibility of the children using it for creative purposes not envisaged by the designers of Touchstones. However, all the required material were to hand and the group work begun. In 'Materials' one of the key resources is a sheet of plastic which has to be tested for strength. In this school the initial plastic sheet was too flimsy to stand up to the testing stategies of the pupils; it is recommended that the advice notes stresses the kind of plastic needed [thin black bin-liner standard will not do!]

How did the children respond to the tasks?

Quite simply, they loved it. They approached the tasks with enthusiasm and commitment. When one Activity was over they wanted to get on to the next and they wanted to do more. 'Are we doing 'Materials, to-day?' was the cry. As a motivational device, this

particular Activity Booklet was a considerable success with the children.

How did the teachers respond to their tasks?

Their main concern was how to cope with the organisational problem of one group working on Touchstones who needed to be observed carefully in order to ensure fairness in recording pupil's attainments while having to be aware of the needs of, say, 23 other 7+ children in the class. This concern dominated all other responses. Possible alternatives were considered such as using a 'floating' teacher or arrangements whereby the Head or someone else took care of a large assembly of children while Touchstones work was being carried out. When this problem was put into the context of each child needing to be assessed over a minimum of three Activity tasks the organisational imperatives appear formidable.

'It's impossible to do this properly while the rest of the class is doing normal work'. In other words for this teacher cross-curricular activities with one group could be achieved only by unusual and possibly educationally dubious practices. 'Can one teacher really do justice to the group and to the class as a whole?'

The other main concern of the teachers was the considerable underestimation of the time suggested in the Touchstones Teacher's Guide for the recording of pupil information. Data had to be recorded in the Group Assessment Booklet [with appropriate observations], transferred to the Individual Attainment Profile and then translated into ordinary language for the 'Summary of strengths and needs' and 'Suggestions for follow-up'. The time taken to record all the information for one group of six pupils on one workbook was between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. No doubt with familiarity and confidence this time could be reduced but it also has to be remembered that minimum of three workbook will have to be completed for each group of 4-6 children before sufficient

information has been acquired to produce a reliable picture. It is my view that most assessment guides underestime the time needed for recording: ideal conditions are presented as the norm] In addition, when other subjects come 'on stream' the total number of Atainment Targets per child will rise from the present 33 at Key Stage 1 for the three core subjects of Maths, English and Science. As was said, 'Will we spend as much time assessing as teaching'?

The teachers were pleased with their pupils' responses and with the quality of their discussion and experimental intelligence. They rated the Booklets as attractive and motivating and they found the Teacher's Guide to be well planned and it communicated the structure of Touchstones in a clear and logical manner.

Doing the Assessment

While the guidance given within the Group Assessment Booklet for each activity with Materials enabled the teachers to pin-point achievement in relation to Attainment Targets with confidence there was also a problem. Both teachers found it very hard to ignore their detailed knowledge of the children. The classteacher felt considerable tension when it came to recording achievement if the behaviour observed in the Touchstones sessions differed significantly from her knowledge of the child's performance and capabilities in the classroom. In fact, so great was the desire to be 'fair' to the child what was recorded was not so much what was seen in the group work but what was known.

This led to a discussion about what might be required under NC assessment procedures if teachers were obliged to substantiate their opinion about a child's achievements. The significance of Teacher Assessment as against the importance of Standard Attainment Tasks was considered.

The teachers commented that the way the Workbooks were set out may have disadvantaged some pupils. For example, English AT3

'Writing' suggests that at Level 1 the pupil 'Uses isolated letters, words or phrases to communicate meaning' while for the same AT, a Level 2 performance requires the pupil to independently produce a short piece of writing 'using complete sentences'. The Workbook format, which is familiar to these pupils encourages pupil to respond with single words or phrases. Taking this style of responding to the Touchstones Work Book penalises those who could use sentences. The Guide needs to draw teachers attention to this potential disadvantage for some pupils who conceive of the task as one requiring single word answers. For some children actually cutting the plastic sheet presented a motor difficulty for those with developmental delays.

Did the assessment produce any surprises?

The assessments, over-all tended to confirm impressions gained within the classroom although the problem that it is just those expectations which inform judgements has been mentioned. Running against expectations was the performance of one boy who appeared to be inhibited working in a group although his individual work in class was rated better than average. A pleasant surprise was the pupils who spontaneously reached Level 4 on English AT2 'Reading' through reading aloud a poem expressively with 'confidence and fluency'.

There were some interesting responses from the pupils. For example, one of the first tasks in 'Materials' is to measure a rectangle 10x8 cms on a sheet of paper. All the children, bar one, measured their rectangle in the centre of the paper and cut it out leaving a 'window' in the centre of the paper. The practice in the school was to encourage children to use the machine cut edges of paper when doing such tasks however it appears not to have transferred.

Did the assessment help to diagnose weakness or help to point to the next steps in the learning process?

This can be approached from the perspective of the groups and of individual pupils.

a] the groups

The difficulties some children experienced in cutting the plastic sheets has been mentioned. One general cognitive difficulty arose over inverse logical sequences. There were fewer problems with the task of putting material into a rank order [toughest first] based on their resistance to being rubbed with sandpaper than with inverting the order. This may a reflection on the task and its demand relative to the general cognitive development of pupils in this age group. In one of the groups Activity E [which involved selecting appropriate material for particular jobs] was found to present problems in so far as most could identify the correct material but found it much harder to give a rational explanation for their choice. Diagnostically this may suggest the 7+ pupils in this school need more experience in talking about their ideas.

While there were a few individual children who read the poem with expression the majority 'read in a monotone' and reading with expression may an aspect which requires more attention particularly if it features in Attainment Targets.

b] the individuals

The tasks exposed skill limitations such as those needing help to measure or to cut. Motivational and attitudes factors came into play in the case of one or two children ('T. seemed nervous and lacking in confidence'). There were individual differences in amount and quality of contribution to group discussions ranging from the confident, chatty child through to the 'quietly confident ones' to 'makes little contribution' or 'constantly seeking advice'. On completion of the Individual Pupils Profile comments such as 'a competent reader but needs encouragement in oral participation', ' can use a ruler and scissors but lacks accuracy', 'writes in sentences but does not use

capital letters', or 'needs instruction given more than once' suggests that Touchstones can draw attention to needs as well as strengths although this aspect may need more attention.

Did it help with professional development?

The answer here was a considered 'yes, but...'. It had provided a welcome 'hands-on' experience in which the heretofore remote possibility had become a reality within the school. The LEA the advice to this school was not to be overly concerned with assessment issues until SEAC had pronounced. In discussion it emerged that among all the many pressures Primary teachers are currently experiencing one factor which is slowing up their involvement in thinking about assessment under NC is the presence of existing record systems which have to be maintained until the new procedures are securely in place. Until that happens the NC assessment system is seen as 'bad news' which can be kept away for as long as possible. Touchstones had shown that it was possible to use topic approaches in cross-curricular approaches and that learning and assessment could be meshed into the NC Attainment Targets. Equally valuable was the learning experience of realising that matching performance to Levels could be a combination of 'on the spot' observation and reflection on the record left by the pupils in their workbooks.

It is also important to record that this experience created anxieties as well reassurances especially those which were about classroom organisation and the right balance between teaching time, assessment time and recording time. Touchstones was seen as probably accurately reflecting the current requirements as to assessment but this experience made the teachers to question the the TGAT/SEAC approach and to wish for 'something simpler' although the dangers of this alternative were clear them.

Other views on Touchstones

Kanji[1989][3] was particularly critical of the format of the Touchstones workbooks ['resembling traditional workbooks'] and questioned whether the tasks are really meaningful ['some tasks seem rather remote from the real world'] and saw a lack of awareness of our multi-ethnic society and accuses the material of being tokenist. There are also concerns about how the teacher will mange the classroom organisation while undertaking the group assessment but the greatest anxiety is over the 'test driven primary classroom'. As noted above there are concerns here which are borne out by our experience. We agree with Kanji that the final form of SATs from the Consortia might well be radically different from Touchstones and that 'teachers need to ask searching questions about published materials and be very cautious before plunging in and administering to their pupils' He goes on to offer this opinion that 'their time will be better spent developing and implementing whole school internal assessment policies while the actual SATs are being developed'.

This is sound advice when teacher time, energy and commitment are readily available: in their absence teacher may well feel that and examination of published materials helps to discover what are the critical questions. My personal, view is that while it is right to subject published materials with high sounding claims to the most rigorous of scrutiny, real appraisal come with actual classroom trials. While there is an urgent need in Primary schools for teacher to develop new skills [such as science teaching (Harlen,1989[4])] in my view the most stress making element for Primary teachers is the Juggernaut of Assessment. Inviting them to

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[3]Gulzar Kanji [1989] 'Look before you leap' Times Educational Supplement 3/11/89 p 38

[4]Wynne Harlen [1989] 'Progress Report' Times Educational Supplement 17/11/89 p 62 [Progress in Primary Science:Workshop materials for teacher education]

ask searching questions does not reassure; what most Primary school teachers are looking for now are searching answers.

The work in this school provide the teachers and me with some experience with which to begin to appreciate what will be involved when the assessment procedure are fully implemented. It produced an awareness of the balance of advantages and disadvantages which are endemic to the assessment procedures. It provided us with the basis for developing our own searching questions to bring to bear upon the SEAC proposals, when they arrive.

Part 2

Coming away from the school and my talk with the teachers I was suddenly struck by another meaning that could be attached to the activity on which I had been engaged. In September 1987 [July '87 was the date of publication of the 'Consultation' paper] I spoke to an audience of Heads of Secondary Schools at the University's Education Conference on the background to and issues arising from the Consultation document. At that time I saw the intentions of the Government as applying competitive commercial values to education, de-skilling teachers, proposing a narrowing of curricula and moving control from school to the centre by-passing the LEAs en route. An amazing aspect of the Baker coup was the ease with which the Right had taken over so many educational issues. The Right has taken over the vocabulary of 'standards and excellence'; sniffing a genuine national concern about a range of issues [Britain's competitive status, the break-up of the family, authority, parents anxieties for their children's future, hooliganism etc etc] and used the schools as both a symptom and the cause of many of our economic, social and moral dilemmas.

I was full of a kind of righteous anger at this monstrous take-over of education for what I saw as blatant political motives.

In the interval between then and now very gradually, like Winston Smith, I was coming, if not to love, at least to learn to live with Big Brother. It would be tedious to try and trace this insidious change. However working with these teachers made me examine where I stand in relation to the National Curriculum and what it means to be a professional educator at this time. [I make a distinction here between those academics whose critical reflections upon the ERA are not linked in any way with the training, in-service or further education of teachers]

In a review of Brian Simon's 'Bending the rules'[5] Marsden[6] notes that the Education Reform Act was seen as ending the consensus that had prevailed within our educational system since the 1944 Act. It was described by critics as a centrally orchestrated demolition of the partnership linking government, local authorities, schools, teachers and parents. It was an attempt to wrest power from militant and Militant councils, including the ILEA as well as to control radical and progressive teachers through obtaining a grip on the curriculum and assessment. Among the key motivational tactics employed by Baker and others was the reiteration that ERA reforms had long been foreshadowed and 'enjoyed' all-party support and that they had behind them a general consensus.

Marsden writes of the paradox in which attacks on the National Curriculum come from both political flanks with the Right moaning over lost opportunities as Baker handed over the reins of the key task group to suspect 'progressive' educational experts. Marsden

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[5]Brian Simon. [1988] Bending the rules:The Baker "Reform" of Education. London, Lawrence and Wishart.

[6]William E. Marsden [1989] 'Retreating from consensus' History of Education Quarterly, vol 29, no 3,447-450

appears to articulate the current dilemmas of professional educators who have the task of maintaining a critical view of the Act while feeling an emotional commitment not to add to the further demoralisation of teachers, schools and LEAs. His conclusion and wish, is that the debate, 'the bitter conflict,' remains at the 'ideological, armchair level, leaving those responsible for implementation to establish a modus vivendi'. That can be read as a wish to make the 'consensus' a reality.

Assessment

Among the earliest and most profound criticisms of the National Curriculum was it ideological commitment to an assessment led model in which 'tests' shaped the curriculum. Concerns over the assessment driven curriculum grew with the bifurcation of the National Curriculum apparatus into two separate organisations, one responsible for the curriculum and the other for assessment [NCC/TGAT(SEAC)]. Thoughtful commentators drew the inference that the logical and practical benefits of having the curriculum and its assessment as an unified organic entity were less important that the politically motivated desire to keep assessment clear of the progressives and to enable it to be used for ends other than educational. The TGAT Report when it emerged did much to allay fears with its insistence upon assessment as formative as well as summative and indissolubly linked to learning and teaching.

The significance of Assessment is not only as a check on the delivery of the National Curriculum and to record pupil progress but it is critical for the functioning of the whole Reform Act. It is the major accountability system through which teachers, schools and LEAs will be appraised. TGAT had to reconcile the requirement to provide information of an <u>educational</u> nature on and to pupils, to teachers and to parents, with the requirement that the system yields data to be presented in reports produced by schools and authenticated by LEAs so as to reach a wide public audience which includes central government. The TGAT report shows the two languages of this dichotomy:the parle of the concerned educator and

that of the accountant. Coulby suggests the real purposes of assessment is to 'provide the Treasury with some measure of the cost effectiveness of schools'[7]

The British Journal of Sociology of Education symposium on National Assessment[8] expressed it this way

> **'TGAT was in an impossible position. If the assessment arrangements were to fulfil the requirements of the Secretary of State, first they had to be' simple','clear' and 'cost-effective'...and secondly must balance the promotion of learning with need for summative information for 'publicising and evaluating the work of the education service'....within these constraints...doubtful..they could do more than...humanise the assessment and testing operation'**[p 234]

The claim by Paul Black[9] that assessment is not marginal but central and an 'inherent part of teaching and learning' [p 9] and that it provides a language for communication between teachers, pupils, parents and other teachers is both an encouragement and a warning. The complexity of Core and Foundations Subjects, Profile Components, Attainment Targets, Ten Levels, Four Key Stages, Teacher's Assessment and Standard Assessment Tasks suggests that while pedagogically, assessment should be an inherent part of teaching and learning, in its threatened form, it is likely to be a significant and possibly damaging drain on teacher energies and

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[7]David Coulby [1989] 'The hidden purpose behind testing' The Independent 7/12/89 p 21

[8]Keith Kimberley, Ian Hextall, Harry Torrance and Bob Moon [1989] 'National Assessment and Testing; the TGAT Report' British Journal of Sociology of Education vol 10 no 2 p233-251.

[9]Paul Black [1989] 'Assessment and the Curriculum' In, David Thomas [1989] [Ed] The National Curriculum; Moving into Focus? Liverpool Evaluation and Assessment Unit, Department of Education, University of Liverpool.

resources as well as providing data for a variety of political purposes. If there had been time for careful planning and effective in-service support for teachers some of the worst of the anxieties might have been avoided.

One of the TGAT platforms was that assessment, including SATs will become part of 'everyday practice' and that required forms of assessment will not jeopardise imaginative teaching. However even this very limited experience with part of Touchstones suggested the power of external assessment devices in alerting teachers to the possibility [and even desirability] of changing curriculum and pedagogy to improve pupil's chances of doing better on the SATs: teaching to the tests is on its way. Subject-centred modes of teaching could also threaten pupil-centred approaches. At in-service conferences today the teacher -talk is all about assessment:you have listen very hard to hear anything being said about Programmes of Study.

These are but a few of the concerns raised by the planned assessment procedures.

Beyond the assessment issues there are other matters related to the intermeshing of assessment procedures and principles with aspects of the Reform Act such as open enrollment, grant-maintained schools, local management and City Technology Colleges which indicate that we should see the National Curriculum and its assessment integral to a broader political intent. I saw, and to some extent still see, this whole enterprise as the seizure by the centre of power and control following the planned and well-executed destruction of the consensus, imperfect though that had been[10], which had encouraged a sense of shared values between the State,

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[10]Leslie Bash and David Coulby [1989] The Education Reform Act;competition and control. Cassell

citizens and educators. In its place has been erected the idol of competition.

Here we may see the most pernicious effects of the assessment process. It is the chief mechanism by which competitive market forces produce differentiation between LEAs, schools, pupils and potentially, between teachers. The 'objective' data from assessment will inevitably mean a focus upon educational outcomes and not processes. Even the much vaunted 'broad and balanced curriculum for all' can be seen as a way of supplying a standard diet [content and resources] for all: irrespective of individual needs.

The account given by the Minister of State of Education, Angela Rumbolt, leave no doubt as to what the future holds as schools success in reaching educational objectives is measured. Checklists of performance measures in areas such as examination results, pupil attendance, homework and vandalism are going to be sent to LEAs for circulation. 'Schools had to follow the example of business', she said, at a Conference on 'What makes a better school'[Presumably the irony was missed] [11]

I doubt whether the ERA has anything of substance to contribute to the effective redress of socio-educational disadvantage or in meeting special educational needs.[12] [13]

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[11] Simon Midgley [1989] 'School to get 'goals' checklist'. The Independent 6/12/89 p3

[12] Frank Field [1989] Losing Out:the emergence of Britain's Underclass. Basil Blackwell.

[13] Klaus Wedell [1989] 'Will the 1988 Act promote good education for children with special educational needs?' NASUWT Career Teacher Journal, pp28-29 Dec 1989

Even within its own terms of reference difficulties have been confounded by lack of clarity as to the specifics of assessment procedures and we will have to wait until 1990 for an authoritative statement from SEAC:after the National Curriculum is in place..

Among the dilemmas presented to schools is that it is only now that we can see the problems that have been created by allowing the curriculum task groups and the assessment and testing group to have operated independently. The subject working groups did not address assessment issues directly but concentrated upon delivering the best curriculum framework for the subject. This was expressed philosophically as a reluctance to allow assessment to direct children's learning. But as Wynne Harlen [1989][14] expressed it

> **'as soon as the test procedures and instruments become public property they will be seen as the source of answers ..to questions of definition and application. The process of developing the curriculum....is in the hands of the test developers'** [p18].

When I saw the teachers in the trial school begin to interpret the Attainment Targets and the criteria for reaching Levels within the Attainment Targets as implying changes in their teaching practice, I believe I saw the way things will go and that teaching to the Targets is on the agenda. And since the way pupils perform on the SATs will be one important aspect of a teacher's professional reputation the temptation will be all but irresistible.

Not only irresistible but laudable if the goal is to enable pupils to scale the Assessment Levels. Not only laudable but imperiously

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[14]Wynne Harlen, [1989] 'Assessment at 7' in Thomas. D. [Ed] The National Curriculum; moving into focus? LEAU

demanded by certain kinds of parents and even by Heads anxious for the public reputation of their schools.

Teachers' problems

In summary teachers concerns appear to be over the speed with which changes are being introduced, the need for effective training, for adequate resources, the complexity of the assessment and the assessment and reporting arrangements, problems of recruiting properly qualified staff and getting detailed guidance on the curriculum for the 14-16 year group.

Local Authority concerns

Like individual teachers LEAs have their [growing ?] concerns about the National Curriculum and the ERA, not least their political emasculation as power moves to the centre. These range from the depletion of resources for all to support the much unloved CTC's inhibiting the development of educational opportunities for the more deprived areas, suspicion the new-look NC will still mean old-style differentiation along the class boundaries, that Open Enrollment is mere political gimmickry, parental 'freedom of choice' as being a choice only for a favoured few and the ERA doing little to repair neglected school buildings or provide more teachers.[15]

Departmental dilemmas

But schools are not the only ones with dilemmas to face. Those of us in higher education have our own. At the PGCE level concern is being felt by tutors and students over the way in which

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[15]David Ward [1989] 'Jobson's choice words' The Guardian, 12,12,89 p 25

'training to become a teacher' has been replaced by 'learning about the National Curriculum, Assessment and Records of Achievement'.

The National Children's Bureau in 1988 had drawn attention to the issue that **'recent central directives have once more fuelled a tendency regrettably present in many training institutions to give more time, resources and status to subject studies at the expense of classroom management skills and practical experience'**[16]

In my Department PGCE tutors are divided into at least two broad groups
a] those who see themselves as a social group parallel to teachers in the schools, obligate to 'deliver' the National Curriculum so the students in turn can 'deliver' on Teaching Practice and when in post
and b] those who profoundly detest Baker, his successor, and all their works and would wish to retain a view of education consistent with, for example, values about a shared ownership of the curriculum or of the importance of aesthetic or moral education or personal and social dimensions of education. They cannot shake off the imposed imperative that the National Curriculum exists but what should be their approach to their students? Can they 'deliver' the skills and processes which their students will need and be expected to have, while simultaneously holding the view that the enterprise is a discreditable one ?

These differing perception extend into the INSET area. Similar dilemmas exist here. There are colleagues who subscribe to the view that the role of the professional educator at this time is to be supportive of teachers and school in a time of change and of stress. The INSET approach adopted here is to treat the National Curriculum and its assessment as morally and pedagogically neutral

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[16] Quoted in Tony Charlton and Kenneth David [Eds] [1989] 'Managing Misbehaviour' Macmillan Educational p231

and the INSET task is to facilitate the technicalities of the delivery and assessment procedures. The slogan for this group is 'Be positive'! Whatever individual tutors may feel about the ERA this is camouflaged when relating to teachers.

A variant of this position is promote the acquisition of relevant skills and ideas and then to indicate some 'personal concerns' about the National Curriculum leaving the teachers to sort out for themselves whether there is any relationship between the two discrepant view. In essence this approach indicates, 'The National Curriculum contains some things which are bad for kids and schools but you have to do them because you must and I will show you how to do it.' Schools and LEAs sending teachers on courses may not welcome INSET which is based upon a radical critique of ERA and the National Curriculum since what they wish is something more 'practical' and 'relevant'.

Some professional educators find themselves trapped between the promptings of their Vice-Chancellors to go out and raise more cash through INSET and personal-professional value system which are inimical to the National Curriculum and its assessment intentions.

At the advanced courses/ Higher Degree level the tensions are much less evident since their nature implies a legitimation of critical approaches. Even here some problems can exist where LEAs second teachers to undertake specific tasks for them. If a teacher is sent away to produce a workable policy on Records of Achievement for his or her LEA there is some expectation that this will be delivered even if critical reflection by the teacher leads them to question whether the current view of the DES on Records of Achievement ought to be rejected.

The moral problem for some professional educators at this time is what form should their critical view take when addressing a teacher audience?

The uncomplicated position is one of an open and honest disclosure of one's doubts and concerns and an unwillingness to take part in activities which are supportive of the ERA. Equally uncomplicated would be the position of those who can, without qualms support ERA and the National Curriculum. But even the former position is not without its difficulties for unless the professional educator is prepared to indicate what are the personal, social and political consequence for teachers and tutors, which flow from rejecting ERA and NC [in whole or in part] it will little more than public self - flagellation.. In other words, if I find the political origins and intentions of ERA flawed or unacceptable is it sufficient to express these views to teachers,? If I deliver the same message to a school-based INSET group what does that message imply for the reflective and socially committed teacher?

The intellectual, political and moral ambiguities raised by ERA and the NC for professional educators are complex and formidable. Where the argument is leading is towards some emerging clarification of individual positions and a tentative recognition that for many of us the Marsden 'modus vivendi' approach is not satisfying if we have to stifle or suspend our beliefs.

John Elliott[17] comes close to articulating the feelings of many professional educators at this time

> 'My fear about our national curriculum and assessment framework is that it will confine the process of teaching and learning to the shadows of education excellence rather than enable it to manifest the powers of understanding which

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[17]John Elliott [1989] 'Disconnecting knowledge and understanding from human values; a critique of national curriculum developments' in Thomas,D.1989 [Ed]

constitutes such excellence. This need not happen if schools and LEAs seize the initiative and generate broader and more valid curricular frameworks which serve to counter-balance a national framework that distorts the nature of education for the sake of producing 'conventionally valid' assessments of surface knowledge'

The current events in Eastern Europe are reminders of the price paid in the past for silence and conformity. Getting out of the academic arm chair and poking one's head over the parapet to see what the action is like does not mean that one agrees to join the fight. The dilemmas are, to change the image, whether to become a detached observer, a committed spectator, an active player or joining some society for the abolition of competitive sports.

The quotation from John Elliott is an expression of the worries besetting professional educators. He writes of a national framework which promotes the shadows rather that realities of learning and distorts the nature of education itself. His solution to the problems he sees in the National Curriculum is the seizure of initiatives for change by 'schools and LEAs'. This suggests that what we have at the moment in higher education is conceptual and leadership vacuum.

Bash[18] offers the view that some kind of 'rescue' operation could be attempted - forming a 'new agenda'. He sees the 1988 Act as containing inconsistencies and conflicts and lacking in coherence but having some aspects worth saving [the idea of 'a' national curriculum, greater autonomy for polytechnics and colleges of higher education, increased participation by parents in the running of schools etc] He argues that the national curriculum and

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[18]Leslie Bash [1989] 'Postscript:towards a fresh agenda' In Bash,L and Coulby, D [1989] The Education Reform Act:competition and control Cassell

educational democracy requires that the curriculum is neither owned by teachers nor owned by politicians and that consistency in curriculum delivery country-wide is not to be despised. Bash asserts, but without much confidence that the Act will encourage in teachers a 'greater degree of unity at the national level'. The emergence of a new 'collective consciousness' over the educational spectrum in alliance with parents is forecast but the social processes by which the emergence is facilitated is not discussed.

The surveys which are coming from the Joint Subject Association Monitoring Group may be an example of a way in which investigations by teacher interest groups can at least voice their concerns.[19] However one commentator has has argued that teachers will very shortly become more than 'concerned' as the 'timebomb' of standard assessment tasks is delivered and the fine promises of TGAT give way to the short, sharp tests that are about to be introduced.[20]

It is suggested by Bash that progressive and democratic 'forces' can take the initiative in respect of change. However such forces should not, in his view, take the form of 'embattled enclaves of radical practice' nor 'theoretical studies for academic reflection' but by 'involvement in local and institutional policy formation'. What is not at all clear is how such local involvement can seriously influence national policy without some kind of national co-ordination nor whether some rapprochement might be possible between theoretical studies and alternative practices. Bash is no sans-culotte for 'calling the people to the barricades

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[19]Times Educational Supplement 1/12/89 'Too few tools to do the curriculum job'. Among teacher complaints were, inadequate in-service training, insufficient equipment, lack of time for assessment, delays in getting vital information, information garbled by the cascade model'

[20]Coulby, David [1989] The Independent 7/12/89 p 21

to over turn a bankrupt political regime' is seen as not worth the effort.

If this represents the attitude of professional educators then it is hardly surprising that the education citadels were capture by Bakerite barbarians enabling, as Bash notes himself, the creation of an Act 'designed for political effect'.

Is waiting for the new collective consciousness enough? Getting out of one's armchair may be the first step towards dreaming how we could capture the Bastille: this surely cannot be a solitary dream?

An important task for higher education is to collect evidence and prepare position papers so as to influence the educational debate at the level of principles and key structural features. Beyond that we need to create an alternative vision. Such a vision may contain elements derived from current legislation since there some aspects may be worth retaining. If we go on presenting a negative vision ['we don't like what you are having to do'] without developing an alternative which is different from and better than a nostalgic Stenhousian wish-fulfilment fantasy we had better surrender our academic freedom, burn our AUT cards and join the Civil Service [Cheltenham branch].

We should remember that the original claim to 'consensus' was bogus. There was a widely articulated view that change was desirable but not in the form produced by Baker. It is now probably forgotten that a major political figure of our time described 'consensus' in the following,

'To me consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies. So it is something in which no one believes and to which no one objects'[21]

The variety of dissenting and disenchanted voices make it unlikely that there would be a unanimity of views about what is wrong with ERA or how to correct its worst features. It does seem to me that academics, LEA administrators and serving teachings do share sufficient doubts about present policies and practices as to make some kind of alliance a distinct possibility. It can not be enough to leave the opposition to teachers alone. The questions I would like to leave are these

a] what are the Department's views of the National Curriculum and how is it to be made manifest to students?

b] what part can the Department play as a focus for concerned criticism and reflection on the NC and the ERA?

Comments and Reactions Please

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[21] M Margaret Thatcher; Quoted by Dennis Healey in his Autobiography, The Time of My Life. Michael Joseph